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Who is caring for our children?

More than half of Australia's children attend child care, according to figures released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The report examined who looked after children when their parents were not available.

The survey reported that 51 per cent (1.6 million) of Australian children aged under 12 used some type of child care. This proportion increased slightly from 1996 (48 per cent), reversing the reduction in use of care since the 1990 peak of 52 per cent.

For children under five, child care use was even greater with almost two thirds of children in this age group (66 per cent) using some form of care.

Informal care, which included care by relatives and friends remained the most frequently used child care arrangement by Australian families with 37 per cent (1,162,100) of children using it. In the majority of cases, this care was provided by grandparents.

Formal care, which included care in before and after school programs, long day care centres, family day care, occasional care and pre-school was used by 23 per cent (733,200) of children. This represented an increase from 20 per cent in 1996.

Work-related reasons remained the single biggest reason for parents using child care regardless of the type of care used. A large number of parents using formal care (particularly preschool) gave being "beneficial for child" as a major reason for using this care, while parents choosing informal care were more likely to do so for personal reasons.

For 45 per cent of children who used formal care, the cost was less than $20 per week, while in 9 per cent of cases the cost was $100 or more. Informal care remained a relatively inexpensive form of care for parents, with no money being exchanged in 89 per cent of informal care arrangements.

Of working parents, mothers were more likely to make use of particular work arrangements to care for children than fathers (68 per cent compared with 27 per cent). Of those who used work arrangements, mothers were seven times more likely than fathers to opt for permanent part-time work.

Details are in **Child Care, Australia** (cat no. 4402.0) which is available from ABS bookshops. If you wish to purchase a copy of this publication, contact the ABS bookshop in your capital city.

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